[島根県立大学短期大学部松江キャンパス研究紀要　Vol. 46　65～74（2008）]

英語を第二言語とする学生を対象とした英文ニュース理解促進のための構造指導

リスキー　カーメラ
（非常勤講師）

Teaching Textual Structure to Make News Accounts More Accessible to Second Language Students

Carmella Lieske

キーワード：genre learning　narrative template　overcoming lexical barriers　learning skills

Abstract

This paper discusses a second language classroom activity to increase students' awareness of the organization of ideas in a narrative. The results of a questionnaire informing the design of the materials suggested that students became bogged down in the lexicon in news articles written in English and, as a result, were unable to grasp the overall meaning. After the activity, students completed another questionnaire; the results indicated that students learned how to comprehend the overall meaning of stories recounting a past event and overcame affective barriers toward newspaper articles. Students also noted that because they became familiar with the narrative template, they were better able to focus on the main points of a written or spoken text. In addition, the learning was transferable, with a large majority applying their new knowledge to the speaking skill.

In spite of the recognized importance of non-grammatical competencies, including discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic, the traditional approach to second language (L2) education has been to divide grammar into discrete, independent points, ignoring larger discourse and authentic communication (e.g., Byrd, 1997). As I was walking down the street one day, a boy yelled, "This is a pen," demonstrating the fact that grammatical competence does not enable L2 learners to use the language appropriately (i.e., to possess sociolinguistic competence). Similarly, grammatical competence, alone, does not provide L2 speakers and writers with the generic competence that is required to "manipulate genre conventions" (Bhatia, 1997, p. 313).

Japanese secondary L2 education focuses on meeting the requirements of high school and university

entrance examinations, thereby emphasizing grammatical competence. As a result, most Japanese students entering tertiary education have not had the opportunity to develop their L2 generic competence. Willis (2000) noted that when writing L2 classroom materials, exercises that raise learners' awareness of typical and useful features of language must be included. One method for doing this and developing students' generic competence is the inclusion of genre analysis in the L2 classroom.

Genre analysis utilizes studies of texts in Anthropology, Communication Research, Ethnography, Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Sociology, Sociolinguistics, and Psychology (e.g., Bhatia, 1997; Bradford-Watts, 2003; Hatch, 1992). It reveals common patterns, templates, and scripts in specific text structures and attempts to explain why a text is written or spoken as it is (Bhatia, 1997). By teaching genre analysis for narratives, descriptions, procedures, and argumentation, students begin to see how key elements of a text (e.g., the character and spatial orientation in narrations) interact with one another. This type of classroom instruction focuses explicitly on increasing students' awareness of a genre, and as a result, Bradford-Watts (2003) asserted that genre-based material is outcome-based.

When introducing genre analysis to L2 students for the first time, the narrative genre should be used. First, it is familiar to students. Storytelling traditions can be found in almost all cultures (Hatch, 1992, p. 165), and the recounting of an event, accident, or occurrence as narrative makes up a significant portion of everyday conversation (Jones, 2001; McCarthy, 1991). In addition, many written and aural news stories are recounts of "this is what happened" (Hatch, 1992, p. 164). Second, the narrative template is the most universal genre (Hatch, 1992, p. 165). Consequently, students' first language experiences may be more pertinent and helpful with narrative activities than when doing activities with description, procedure, or argumentation. Third, although they may be unaware of it, even students in traditional L2 classrooms have experience with the genre. For example, when students learn the past tense, they are asked to talk about what they did yesterday. This is a recount of events, a narrative.

Even though the narrative is familiar, students need specific instruction on how narratives are organized (i.e., the textual structure). Menking (2007) found that although some Japanese university students had the ability to comprehend the details of a news story, they were unable to retell it. He noted, for example, that when students had to retell the story, some did not provide the spatial orientation or main character, and this made it difficult for the interlocutor to begin to understand the event.

Bronia So (2005) noted that genre learning is generally inadequate because rather than representing the genre, texts often focus on a grammar point. Byrd (1997) emphasized that this ignores both the nature and authentic uses of English. Consequently, in order to be truly effective, genre instruction must use authentic materials, which provide learners with a natural mix of grammar structures that belong together. News stories are a readily available source of authentic material, and newspaper articles are often integrated into the L2 classroom to teach vocabulary and grammar, test comprehension, develop reading skills (e.g., scanning), and discuss current events, civilization, and culture (Krajka, 2000; Seedhouse, 1994); however, many Japanese tertiary students find newspapers written in English to be too difficult to understand (Kitao, 1996). Kitao outlined an approach to teaching newspaper organization (e.g., the business section, feature stories) and the grammar of news articles, but he did not use a genre template to teach how a news article might be organized or to enhance students' attempts at overcoming lexical barriers to comprehension.

Materials Development

The classroom activity described in this paper was first created for English majors at a Japanese junior college. The students have an intermediate ability in their L2, English. Before the activity, students responded to a questionnaire; their responses informed the materials design process. First, the results of the questionnaire indicated that only one of the thirteen students (7.7 percent) listened to the news in English outside of class and two students (15.4 percent) read it. However, a majority of the students were interested in listening to and reading the news in English. This was an important discovery that was instrumental in deciding to incorporate a news story into the L2 curriculum. Activities that "focus on issues that are relevant and meaningful to students … can be intrinsically motivating and can engage learners directly" (Taylor, 1987, p. 49).

Second, students' comments on the questionnaire reflected their overwhelming belief that the news is extremely difficult to understand, with vocabulary one of the major obstacles to reading and comprehending the news in English. Students also asserted that there are words and phrases that are unique to the news. This suggests the students lacked the skills to deduce the overall meaning of an article and instead focused on the unfamiliar lexicon, floundering in the words.

In addition to concerns about vocabulary, the students felt listening to the news in English provided further challenges, with 11 (84.5 percent) of the students mentioning the fact that the natural speed of news made it difficult for them to "catch everything." Based on the results of this questionnaire, a task-driven, genre-based activity using a modified authentic newspaper account was designed. A second activity, discussed in Lieske (in press), was also designed to increase students' awareness of linguistic characteristics of the narrative genre, deixis markers, and grammatical cohesive ties.

A written news story rather than a listening text was used for two reasons. First, when students can read the story, they do not have additional anxiety related to processing the text in real time. Second, a written text allows students to focus on the key points without worrying about elements unique to listening, including reduced forms, rate of delivery, speech errors, and the inability to stop the input midstream.

A simple post-activity questionnaire was designed to give students the opportunity to reflect on their learning. It was believed that by completing the questionnaire, the students would more fully realize how they could transfer their new knowledge to their personal L2 uses and needs.

Goals of the Activity

The primary aim of the new material was to increase students' awareness of the organization of ideas in narratives so they can comprehend the overall meaning of a narrative, including a recount of past events. The classroom activity emphasizes procedural knowledge rather than declarative knowledge and encourages students to be active participants in the discovery process. It was hypothesized that the activity would reinforce skills to overcome lexical barriers. It was hoped that through the activity at least some of the students would begin to view news stories as accessible forms of real-world, out-of-class L2 reading and listening.

Activity

The classroom activity combines a task-based and genre-based approach to classroom instruction that allows students to discover the narrative template as they recount a past activity and retell a story. Both of these types of storytelling are communicative functions that these students need to regularly understand and produce when using their L2 outside of the classroom. As the classroom procedure outlined in Appendix 1 demonstrates, the activity can be broadly divided into five interrelated steps.

Brainstorming

Students were asked to name different stories, including those in their daily lives. This not only began to introduce students to the concept of *telling stories* but it also instantiated their schemata and scripts. At first, students were uncertain how to respond, so one example (i.e., what I did yesterday) was given. After this, students gave examples of stories such as:

- comics, TV, movies, books;
- *Cinderella*;
- stories in the news;
- "if I were an animal;"
- dreams.

One student's suggestion, "what kind of food Japanese people eat," led to a dialogue about how this type of discussion is different than a story or a recount of an event.

Elements of a Story

Next, students were asked to identify the major elements of a story. Questions were used to help students define the following elements:

- event;
- character;
- time;
- place;
- plot;
- conclusion or ending.

After students identified these elements, they determined which are usually given at the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Examples were then given of how the conclusion is often predictable (e.g., science fiction books: The humans win the fight and the aliens leave. Action movies: The good guy wins, and the bad guy loses or dies. In *Cinderella* and love stories: *They live happily ever after*.) These first two steps in the activity demonstrated to students their considerable knowledge of the genre, narration.

Talking about Last Night: A New Perspective

Students were asked to use the elements of a story to talk about what they had done the previous night. Discussing past activities is a common task in the L2 classroom, but it is rarely referred to as *storytelling*. Because students were comfortable with the task, their affective barriers were low and they could focus on the task (Ellis, 1994).

Teaching the Narrative Organizational Structure

Students were given a news article that recounts a sailor's struggle to survive after being left at sea for almost two days. The reader is expected to have some prior conceptual and sociocultural knowledge to fully understand the article. For example, the reader must realize *Lieutenant* can be abbreviated *Lt* and that it refers to a person's rank in the Navy. This article, which was challenging because these students did not have this essential knowledge, was chosen so the students would be forced to focus on skills and strategies rather than relying on linguistic comprehension of the story.

Although the typical discourse structure for narratives is not so rigid that there is not variation (Paltridge, 2000), there is a basic narrative template (e.g., Hatch, 1992). As Table 1 demonstrates, the story follows this organizational structure. The narrative about the sailor trying to survive also resembles the generic structure of a conversation involving some crisis or misfortune (Jones, 2001, p. 156). Before discussing the content, students were instructed to look at the picture with the news article. After a student correctly identified it as a ship, a brief discussion emphasized the importance of using the title and non-textual clues to predict the type of story.

● The article's title is the abstract for the narrative.
● The first paragraph includes the spatial orientation, the time, and the main character.
● Beginning with the second paragraph, the story line is "set up" (Hatch, 1992, p. 166) through the introduction of the problem. The goal (i.e., survival) becomes obvious to the reader.
● The plot continues as the hero works toward the goal.
● After the resolution, the story concludes with a coda of evaluative comments that help the reader determine "why this story is worthy of telling" (Hatch, 1992, p. 166).

Table 1. Application of narrative template to the news story.

Students then examined the article. By providing synonyms for the words in the title, students were able to surmise that the story revolves around survival in the water. This task also demonstrated the importance of rephrasing and understanding alternative word choices. Using simple questions related to the elements of a story (e.g., Who is the main character?), students were able to quickly and easily identify the hero, the place, the time, and the basic event in the first paragraph. With assistance, they also realized that the first paragraph contained a summary of the conclusion (i.e., he survived). The progression of events as well as the severity of the problem were simply and easily explained, and questions prompted students to identify other indications of time, place, and character.

The first time this activity was used, students were asked to evaluate the story by formulating a lesson to show the reader why the article is important. Many students believed the story demonstrates the principle, "never give up," although some students felt the illocutionary meaning was "integrate management in the Navy" or "be careful to avoid accidents."

Applying the Template: Telling a Story

Students were instructed to work in pairs and use the elements of a story (i.e., the narrative template) to tell their partner a story from one of their favorite movies, books, comics, or TV shows. This content was quite different from and more complex than their earlier story about last night, emphasizing both the versatility and the usefulness of the template.

When this author used this activity at another college, the students seemed to have less confidence in their ability to retell a story. As a result, I first had an all-class demonstration. Using a series of questions and prompts, I coached one of the more dynamic students to begin the storytelling process. Struggling to know how to begin when I did not react to the Japanese movie's title, he said, "It's a love story." This allowed for a discussion of the importance of providing an overview that allows the interlocutor to begin to imagine and eliminate possible settings, including characters (e.g., There will not be aliens.) and plots (e.g., Someone will probably not be killed.). By the time the student had given the orientation of the story, it was obvious that the other students realized they, too, could tell a story. At this point, the pairs of students began to do the task.

Classroom Results

Students reflected on the activity as they completed a simple post-activity questionnaire, which provided feedback on perceived learning and the effectiveness of the activity. Because the questionnaire was administered to inform the materials development process and not to test L2 language, students were allowed to respond in either English or Japanese. For the following discussion, Japanese responses have been translated into English.

Students were asked whether they thought the classroom instruction was helpful, and all 13 students responded affirmatively. The questionnaire also asked, "How will you use or apply what we studied today?" Students were allowed to give multiple responses to this open-ended questionnaire item. The majority indicated they would apply the learning to three language skills, although one student thought she would use it with all four skills and for storytelling.

Students' comments to both questions demonstrate the types of perceived learning and the benefits of the activity. For example, one student asserted, "Today was good because you used English to explain each of the places where the important points were. Usually when we hear an explanation like this, it is in Japanese, so today was better." Another student wrote, "It was difficult to try to tell my partner a story from TV and the movies, but it was good practice." Perceived learning included an increased awareness of discourse structure, the development of learning strategies, direct application to the speaking skill, and a lowering of affective barriers to accessing the news in English.

Using Discourse Structure to Comprehend Meaning

Students must be aware of the structure of ideas so they are better able to decipher "the overall meaning of a text" (Clarke & Silberstein, 1987, p. 241). The students' questionnaire responses indicate this goal of the activity was successful. All of the students mentioned a new empowerment in being able to comprehend and convey stories by using the main points. For example, one student noted, "It seems like I will get used to reading even long articles if I keep reading them. And, (It's important!!) if I can grasp

the point of the story, it's no problem!" Another asserted, "I was able to experience reading an English news story and really understand it by starting from the big points and working through the content."

Development of Learning Strategies

Learners are better equipped to handle increasingly complex real-world listening and reading texts when they can infer meaning using context, use synonyms in apposition to overcome unknown lexicon, and guess a message without comprehending every word (e.g., Clarke & Silberstein, 1987; Field, 2007). Twelve students (92.3 percent) indicated they began to develop strategies for more effective reading (see Table 2). Similarly, seven students thought that when they listen to something for the first time, they will now focus on the main points rather than trying to understand every detail. In addition, one student noted that she learned to guess the ending.

- "Until today, I thought that I had to understand each word one by one, but today I realized how to understand the main points. I also understood that if I get the main points, I will be able to understand a lot of the content."
- "I realized that it is OK to understand the main points when I am reading something difficult, that I don't have to try to understand absolutely every detail."
- "If I try to find those 5 topics first from the article, I can understand the news even there are some unknown words [*sic*]."

Table 2. Some of the students' comments indicating they began to develop effective reading strategies.

Speaking

Eleven students (84.6 percent) indicated they would use what they had learned in speaking situations. For example, while one student noted, "I'm going to try to speak to make people understand easily [*sic*]," another "realized that when I want to tell something to someone, if they don't understand the words I am using, I can use words with similar meaning and the person will somehow be able to figure out what I am trying to convey." Comments such as these demonstrate students' increased awareness of the importance of adjusting or approximating the message in order to communicate more effectively.

Seven students (53.8 percent) specifically mentioned the ability to organize their aural communication or the ability to tell a story better. One student wrote, "First I tell the main and add some informations [*sic*]." Another student asserted, "When I tell someone a story, I try to describe those five topics [*sic*]." A third student said that she was bad at speaking and storytelling so she wanted to try to use what we had studied, while yet another student explained that if she were in an accident, she might be able to convey what had happened by using the elements of a story that we had discussed.

Lowered Affective Barriers Make the News More Accessible

Learners' affective states are not static; they can negatively influence students' responses to learning activities and students' ability to concentrate on L2 learning (Ellis, 1994). In addition, "learners must become familiar with the experience of not understanding every word that they read or hear" (Field, 2007, p. 34) so that when they do not comprehend everything, students are not struck with debilitating anxiety. After the activity, one student wrote, "I have always hated reading English news articles because they are difficult, but I realized that if I catch these important points, I can read the stories." Another student implied her anxiety toward reading newspaper articles had decreased when she noted, "I realized that if I can catch the most important places, I can easily read and understand the news, but until now, I have not tried to read the news on my own because there are difficult words." Five other students also noted a new accessibility to news stories, which is in stark contrast with their pre-activity questionnaire responses. This change suggests the activity helped over half of the students begin to overcome affective barriers toward news articles that are in English. Because negative anxiety has been shown to have a negative correlation with grades in L2 courses and with speaking and writing performance (Oxford, 1999), this metamorphosis may positively influence students' future L2 progress.

Conclusion

When students view news articles that are in English as a series of incomprehensible words, affective barriers limit their desire to try to read or listen to them. When, however, they see many news stories as nothing more than narratives, the news is demystified, making it more accessible for out-of-class learning. The activity described in this paper allowed students to undergo this transformation. Students deciphered a newspaper article that, at first glance, appeared to be too advanced for them, and they comprehended the main points of the article with minimal dictionary work. As a result, they discovered the fact that lexicon does not have to preclude all comprehension, and they realized they could use organizational structure to comprehend the overall meaning of narratives, including recounts in the news media. This discovery process enabled them to develop learning strategies that they indicated they will apply to their English speaking, reading, listening, and storytelling skills. Finally, over half of the students' affective barriers toward news stories were lowered, further demonstrating the positive results from using a simple activity to increase students' awareness of the narrative template.

References

Bhatia, V. (1997). Introduction: Genre analysis and world Englishes. *World Englishes*, 16(3), 313-319.

Bradford-Watts, K. (2003). What is genre and why is it useful for language teachers? *The Language Teacher*, 27(5). Retrieved November 8, 2007, from http://www. jalt-publications. org/tlt/articles/2003/05/bradford_watts

Byrd, P. (1997). Grammar FROM context: Re-thinking the teaching of grammar at various proficiency levels. *The Language Teacher*, 21(12). Retrieved November 8, 2007, from http://www. jalt-publications. org/tlt/files/97/dec/byrd. html

Clarke, M., & Silberstein, S. (1987). Toward a realization of psycholinguistic principles in the ESL

reading class. In M. H. Long & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Methodology in TESOL: A book of readings* (pp. 233-247). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.

Field, J. (2007). Looking outwards, not inwards. *ELT Journal*, 61(1), 30-38.

Hatch, E. (1992). *Discourse and language education*. Cambridge: CUP.

Jones, R. (2001). A consciousness-raising approach to the teaching of conversational storytelling skills. *ELT Journal*, 55(2), 155-163.

Kitao, K. (1996). Teaching the English newspaper effectively. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 2(3). Retrieved November 10, 2007, from http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Kitao-Newspaper.html

Krajka, J. (2000). Some possibilities for using on-line newspapers in the ESL classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 6(4). Retrieved April 13, 2006, from http://iteslj. org/Techniques/Krajka-OnlineNews. html

Lieske, C. (in press). Deciphering meaning at the discourse level: Examining linguistic characteristics and cohesive ties. *Journal of the Center for Foreign Language Education, Shimane University*, 3.

McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge: CUP.

Menking, S. (2007). Three countries in one day: Retelling the news. *Asian EFL Journal: Professional Teaching Articles*, 18. Retrieved April 25, 2007, from http://www. asian-efl-journal. com/pta_February_2007_sm. pdf

Oxford, R. (1999). Anxiety and the language learner: New insights. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 58-67). Cambridge: CUP.

Paltridge, B. (2000). *Making sense of discourse analysis*. Queensland, Australia: Antipodean Educational Enterprises.

Seedhouse, P. (1994). Using newspapers on CD-ROM. *TESL-EJ*, 1(2). Retrieved November 10, 2007, from http://www. cc. kyoto-su. ac. jp/information/tesl-ej/ej02/a. 3. html

So, B.P.C. (2005). From analysis to pedagogic applications: Using newspaper genres to write school genres. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4, 67-82.

Taylor, B. (1987). Teaching ESL: Incorporating a communicative, student-centered component. In M. Long & J. Richards (Eds.), *Methodology in TESOL: A book of readings* (pp. 45-60). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Willis, J. (2000). A holistic approach to task-based course design. *The Language Teacher*, 24(2). Retrieved February 17, 2005, from http://www. jalt-publications. org/tlt/articles/2000/02/willis

Appendix 1
Classroom Procedure for Teaching the Narrative Template

1. Ask students to name different stories or types of stories in their lives. If necessary, give them a minute to brainstorm in pairs. Write their ideas on the board as they are given.

2. As students refer to their brainstorming ideas, ask them to give important elements of a story. Write them on the board as they are given.

3. Have students get into pairs. Ask them to use the elements of a story to tell their partner what they did last night.

4. Pass out a newspaper article, or a modified authentic article, that recounts an event. Have students identify the elements of a story (i.e., those identified in step 2). If necessary, ask simple questions to help students do this. Provide synonyms, alternative word choices, and rephrases to help students comprehend the main ideas in the story.

   ∨ When selecting and modifying the article, choose one that is lexically complex but not grammatically complicated.

5. Ask students to get back into their pairs. Explain that they are going to tell their partner a story from one of their favorite TV shows, movies, books, or comics. Tell them to use the elements of a story outlined on the board. Have students do the task.

   ∨ The instructor might want to demonstrate how too few details make the story uninteresting. For example, give a story such as "There was a man. He fought the aliens. The aliens left." Ask students questions such as "Was the story interesting? Why or why not?"

   ∨ The instructor might want to also demonstrate how too many details can create a problem for the listener, who may find it difficult to follow the long explanations. For example, say, "There was a tall, dark, handsome man who was wearing a tan leather coat, a red and green plaid shirt, blue jeans that were too short and tight, a straw hat…" This example can also be used to remind students that they do not need to use complex lexicon to convey the essence of a story.

(平成19年11月30日受理)